

Research on Personal Brand Established on the Short Video Platform From the Perspective of Dramaturgy Theory

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Abstract

At present, short videos are still the trend of the industry. The research of this paper will be based on the theoretical perspective of dramaturgy theory and use the typical research methods named case analysis and content analysis to analyze the popular video blogger ‘Zhihao will’ on a specific short video platform Douyin, which is an another official version of Tiktok used in the mainland of China, to conduct analysis and research, and to find out how to establish personal brands basically in the short videos era. After selecting and doing a research on the video contents released by the research subjects from 2018 to 2022, it is found that in the process of using short video as a medium to transmit content, a certain label for characters in short videos are necessarily needed for spreading its desired aims and contents to leave the first impression on audiences.

Keywords: short video, dramaturgy theory, Douyin, personal brand

1. Research Background

In 2022, according to the white paper released by Douyin (2022), ‘interest brands’ will begin to become a new growth point of Douyin. Since Douyin was officially launched in September 2016, it has achieved continuous growths in users and popularity in the past seven years. Especially in 2017, its mother company decided to introduce the company’s core technology ‘algorithmic recommendation’ into this platform. The whole 2017 can be said to be a big year of rapid growth for Douyin. In addition, the increase in the number of mobile users in China in recent years is also a relatively important factor for the short video industry. According to the 49th ‘Statistical Report on the Development of China’s Internet’, the number of mobile users in China reached 1.032 billion people at the end of 2021. At the same time, among these online users, the number of people who use their private mobile phones to watch short videos exceeds 930 million. It could be clearly concluded that Douyin is a very popular application in the current Chinese creative industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Different Aspects of Short Video Research

In the existing literature, studies involving short videos have focused on different research aspects. Two functional areas including the use of music and the social interactions have been concentrated on by these current researches. These two functional elements are also the foundation of Douyin at the beginning of its establishment. In these researches, Kong (2018) and Wu (2018) represent the main use of these two research aspects in their studies. Kong (2018) expresses the importance of Douyin is to help audiences improve their passions to express themselves in the music area. Besides that, Wu (2018) takes the different points such as audiences’ psychology in to her consideration. Wu (2018) also has used the Use and Satisfaction theory in the research to analyse the psychological interaction of these short-video application users during the Douyin time. Similarly, Tian (2018), besides the normal macro analysis of selected short videos, introduced a theory of communication to understand the interactions between people in the contents of these short videos on Douyin.

2.2 Dramaturgy Theory—Theoretical Basis

The Dramaturgy theory could be a proper theoretical basis of the research on short video platforms, especially Douyin. The Dramaturgy theory was created by Goffman (1956), and is a continuous theory in sociology studies, cited by Feng (2008) in the translated version of the original book named *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. The Dramaturgy theory is a study that draws on the analogy of drama to everyday life. The closing distance of this theory may be a relatively relevant point of using this theory as a research basis for analysing contents on

Douyin. The Dramaturgy theory believes that society and life are big stages, and the social members on the stage, as performers, are very concerned about how to create an acceptable image in front of a large audience. People will use various methods and techniques to influence others. Goffman (1956), cited by Feng (2008), also called this behavioral process as impression management.

The flattening trend of the Internet has allowed platforms like Douyin to give more people the opportunity to perform on the Internet and build their own Internet image. The mobile phone screen separates the performer from the audience, building a modern explained meaning of stage. Many people design transcripts and then produce their own short videos on Douyin, which is a process of creating an impression that can be accepted by a large number of audiences in this digital stage. The ultimate goal is to get more likes and more followers. A large number of producers will use various techniques or skills, including production skills, behavioral skills in videos, and selection of vertical video background scenes, etc., to establish a good personal brand impressions and images, in order to catch the attention of Douyin audiences and win their own fandom.

According to Goffman (1956, cited in Feng 2008), People perform in different roles at different times in social life. Performance always obeys the script designed by content makers, but when the script is unclear or incomplete, it may be adaptable that these performers at the front stage temporarily create their own-thinking contents. Douyin move towards script, because the creator of short videos of Douyin wants to attract more digital included users. Due to the small amount of picture information provided by the production of the short videos itself is not enough to retain a large number of viewers for a long time, so it is necessary to supplement the script to make short-video contents move in the direction of storytelling, in order to retain and attract more people through the fun of the story. However, in the process of some short video production and shooting, unexpected events will occur, jumping out of the so-called “script”, such an incomplete script requires the creator to be able to adapt, but such an adaptability may create an interesting full short videos to win more likes and followers, which may be a hot trend in a certain time period.

Goffman (1956) divides human behavior into the front stage and backstage. In the foreground, people present an image that is acceptable to others and society. The backstage is relative to the front stage, and it is an occasion to prepare for the front stage performance and cover up the things that cannot be performed in the front stage. For Douyin’s creators of numerous short videos, shooting and uploading videos on Douyin is a process of performing in the front stage, and the constructed character is just a corner of the photographer’s character, or all of them may be constructed by planning these videos. The virtual image of the photographer, and the real life behind it occurs at the backstage, which may also hide the unknown side of the producer. The content made at the back stage could complement extra information to audiences that other people do not know about the performers.

3. Research Methods and Research Objects

This paper mainly adopts the case analysis method. This research will focus on the contents published on Douyin by “Zhihao will” from 2018 to the present. After a specific interpretation of the background of this selected producer in the short video platform, in this research, five representative short videos, which are normally attractive in more than 100 thousand persons’ minds, will be selected and compared to show difference in the different production era in the establishment of personal brands. In the analysis procedure, three aspects based on the dramaturgy theory will be used for understanding the whole change of this personal brand leaving initial impressions.

4. Analysis

4.1 General Backgrounds

The Douyin account Zhihao will is a Douyin account owned by a person named Zhang Zhihao. The first Douyin was released on March 5, 2018. Until the 1st July, 2022, this account has been followed by over 6.5 million users, and it has received nearly 100 million likes. The profile of this Douyin content producer says (2022) Zhihao will presents mainly about a Chinese modern family. Both of his parents are professors teaching in high educational institutions, and he is purely a content maker in digital media, especially in the short video field.

4.2 The Typically Selected Short Video Based on the Dramaturgy Theory

“The Bottom Line When Women Shop” released on September 12, 2018. This short video had gotten 1.7 million likes for Zhang Zhihao’s interpretation of the real appearance of a girl buying a bag. No matter how many expensive designer bags are, they can be considered directly, but at the end of the payment, it is found that it costs 10 US dollars, and the courier fee will be paid, the character has to give up immediately. Through such an interpretation of the plot with a small reversal at the end, the image of a vivid shopping woman has been created

in the front stage of all audiences.

4.3 The Typical Characteristics

4.3.1 The Background Music Keeps a Fixed Style

The biggest feature of the Douyin platform itself is short videos with music. There are only three kinds of commonly used music, and the rest of the videos have no background music. Moreover, the use of background music is closely related to the content and plot of the short videos shot during this period. The music is distributed in performing stages.

4.3.2 Content Scene Life

As a personal Douyin account, being close to the life is the key to winning the audience. All the shooting scenes of research-focused short videos are very life-like scenes, and most of them are produced in the office or at work. The content of filming and discussion are common problems in life. For example, "It's a lot of work to charge the mobile phone..." shows that contemporary people have an extremely strong dependence on mobile phones. No matter what conditions, the low-charge of mobile phones power is the most important such a disaster.

4.3.3 A Large Number of Reversal Plots and Strong Interest

The Douyin account uses exaggerated performances that appeal to the normal situation in life in the interpretation of the plot. In addition, the plot reversal of some short video contents enhances the sense of interest in the video, which can make the audience laugh. For example, the latest release "No matter how delicious the takeaway is, it can't get over this threshold". At the beginning of the video, the protagonist Zhang Zhihao seriously disliked bread when he was hungry, and wanted to order takeaways such as mutton skewers, crayfish, etc. Facing to the 30-minute delivery time, he gave up decisively and went back to his friend who begged for bread. Such a small reversal makes the audience feel a little surprised at the end of this short video. The exaggerated body movements and the last small reversal make the audience laugh and also reflect some phenomena and problems in the real life of the society.

4.3.4 Combine Personal Own Advantages to Form a Unique Positioning

All the short videos of "ZhiHao Will" are performed in English. Of course, in order to consider the effect of communication, Chinese subtitles are added. Zhang Zhihao himself is a "returnee" who came back from studying abroad, and his excellent English personal characteristics have been added to the production of the entire Douyin video contents. As a personal Douyin account, unlike other official government accounts with an authoritative background, unlike the corporate Douyin account with a corporate culture, a personal Douyin account may have its own clear positioning. "Zhihao will" perfectly interprets this.

5. Discussion

The impression left by personal brands may be different according to the personality of each blogger, and the brand image formed at the front stage is basically different. Of course, there will also be the influence of brand positioning. Therefore, for the analysis of the content of communication, future research will also need to do more consideration of its brand positioning perspective or personal characters in the analysis of short videos.

6. Conclusion

To establish a successful personal brands on short-video platforms such as Douyin, two aspects should be considered fully to help brands leave impressive impressions in people's minds through their performances at the front stage.

6.1 An Interesting Script

The production of short video contents should be scripted, which is the general rule of short video content creation, but on top of this, on the basis of understanding how to script the video, it is possible to create a video that grabs the audience's attention and attention. Just like "ZhiHao Will", most of the videos are in a humorous tone, which can arouse the audience's desire to watch. If you want to make the entire short video interesting and humorous, the most commonly used method are two kinds, that is, the interesting and strange theme or the contrast reversal of the plot at the end of short videos.

6.2 A Good Scenario

The diversity of scenes requires learning scene innovation when creating short videos, but on top of this general rule, we should not blindly pursue complete scene innovation, nor do we want to create dangerous and risky videos, but to do the location of the scene should be appropriate, just like the personal account "ZhiHao will" scene is placed in the home and work environment, appropriate scenes can give a better help to the presentation

of the plot.

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